

RHETORICAL ODYSSEY AND TRAJECTORIES: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

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Abstract: The present paper outlines a self introspective undertaking germane to the issue of rhetorical awareness. This issue is imbricated in the realm of academic writing in English (particularly, English as a foreign language). As a self retrospective endeavor, the paper starts with some personal account undergirding the writing of the present paper. Some self delineation teasing out the context for the rhetorical awareness will also be presented. Some attempts to read the main issue raised in the paper against the backdrop of the wider context (within the gamut of ELT) will conclude the paper.

Key words: rhetorical awareness, self introspection, academic writing, ELT

The advent of contrastive rhetoric studies in the 1960s has induced mushrooming rhetorical studies intertwined with genre analysis (e.g., Adnan, 2004; Ahmad, 1997; Bhatia, 1997; Budiharso, 2001; Cahyono, 2001; Mirahayuni, 2001; 2002; Misāk et al., 2005; Safnil, 2000; Susilo, 1999; 2004). Despite the myriad studies, self introspective approach has not shown its ascendancy in the literature on contrastive rhetoric studies. The present writing discusses some of the fluid results of a self-introspection into my rhetorical awareness in English academic writing. This paper was sparked, in particular, by two events. The first was Professor Swales' question, "What does advanced writing skill mean to you?", addressed to the class of his ELI 620 unit (*Dissertation and Writing for Publication I*) at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in November, 2005, which I was auditing. The second was, within the same week, Tardy's (2005) article "*It's like a story*": *Rhetorical knowledge development in advanced academic literacy* published in *English for Specific Purposes* (4, pp. 325-338) con-

comitantly brought to my attention as she was giving a talk at the English Language Institute (ELI), University of Michigan—Ann Arbor. (Other factors will constitute the flesh and bone of the present paper).

As is the case of Tardy's, I have found that there is a tendency of academic writing to be based on research involving subjects other than the researchers themselves. In the article, Tardy (2005) presents the results of her research into the rhetorical knowledge development of two international graduate students at an American university. Tardy's work tinkered my faculty so as to question: "Why not putting me as one of the subjects of the study (or of a similar kind), for, as an Indonesian, I might make an international student within the context of U.S. academic setting?" This issue also led me to think: "Had Tardy incorporated me into the pool of her research subjects, she might have come to different findings, for I think I do not really share similar rhetorical trajectories as those reported in Tardy's study." On the one hand, the fact shows that I have missed out the chance to be a subject of Tardy's study, hence, I was unable to voice out my rhetorical trajectories. On the other hand, I can take the opportunities to opine my own rhetorical awareness comparable to and different, to some extent, from Tardy's subjects. What I have been thinking is if Tardy could select the narratives of her two research subjects, I can select my own narratives, for I am also a potential research subject. I can exhaust my "agency" as a living-thinking subject better than Tardy's research subjects, for I am acting both as a research subject and a researcher concurrently. Here comes, subsequently, this self-introspective paper, which bears some similarities to that of, for instance, Knee (1999), Papp (1999), and Orb'n (1999).

Whilst Knee and Papp stretch ideas deriving from their teaching experience in settings culturally different from their origins, Orb'n presents her observation as a student. So, Knee and Papp share a similar position to that of Tardy, but differ in terms of their research subjects. Tardy took others as objects of research whereas Knee and Papp researched into their own recollections. Orb'n, on the other hand, stands in the position similar to Tardy's research subjects. The difference is that, Orb'n has the freedom to organize her own observation, whereas Tardy has the power to select materials stemming from her research subjects. Both kinds have a similar subjective-qualitative approach. In this line, the present paper bears some similarity of research methodology to that of Orb'n.

Whereas Papp and Orb'n have been concerned with academic settings in Eastern Europe, Knee's concern has been that in Asia—Bangkok, Thailand. Tardy, on the other hand, has dealt with students with Asian cultural back-

ground. In this line, the present paper has a cultural concern similar to that of Knee and Tardy. Yet, it deals with an Indonesian who has been learning English as a foreign language. This being the case, although the present piece has some affinity with the (auto)biographic papers amalgamated and edited by D. Belcher and U. Connor (2001) in the volume titled *Reflections on Multiliterate Lives*, it deals with the rhetorical awareness of an individual to whom English is foreign and whose academic stature is quite peripheral. Those (e.g., Nils Erik Enkvist, A. Suresh Canagarajah, and Andrew W. Cohen) invited to write or interviewed and reported in the collection by D. Belcher and U. Connor are very much celebrated and have already had some putative “academic claws” in the inscription and shaping of the world academic discourse, particularly, in the area of Applied Linguistics or English Language Teaching (ELT). In other words, the present paper fills in the (possibly) unavailable literature on English writing by Indonesian writers talking about their own experience of learning English, especially, pertinent to rhetorical issues.

DELINEATING MYSELF: AN EFL LEARNER

As an Indonesian born in Java in the early 1970s, I am a native Javanese. To me, Indonesian was a second language which I started to learn in the second year of my elementary school. Yet, as I see it now, Indonesian serves as my academic language; I would now consider Indonesian as my native tongue. My foreign language includes Arabic and English, English being the latest L2 I learned. In 1991, I started seriously learning English as my undergraduate major at the Department of English Language Education, Institute of Teacher Training and Education, Malang (*IKIP MALANG*, now *Universitas Negeri Malang*) East Java, Indonesia.

During my undergraduate studies, I was taught by Indonesian lecturers/professors; I did not have the “luxury” of being taught by native speakers of English as those registered in 1993 and on up till then. When my time to write a thesis came, I was in tremor considering that I just received C’s for my *Writing I* and *Writing II*, B for *Writing III* and A for *Writing IV*. The only A I gained for the writing courses was unfortunately a grade for the course of 2 credit points. *Writing I*, *II*, and *III*, on the other hand, were of 4 credit hours each. So, calculating my GPA for the writing courses, I found it reasonable to run into palpitation when I had to write a thesis. Anyhow, I decided to embark on writing a thesis in English.

In order to complete the thesis, I decided to read undergraduate theses written in English. Although I realize now that I was actually directed to find research articles (through the courses of *Research Methods* and *Thesis Writing Seminar*) as the primary sources for research and thesis writing, I was not really aware of the significance of researching such a kind of materials. Partly, I was thinking that research articles (RAs) were different from theses, particularly with regard to their face look (RAs tend to be shorter than theses). At this point, my strategy was somewhat different from that of one of Tardy's (2005) subjects—seeing RAs and theses equivalent. Nor was I aware of a wider audience other than my two thesis advisers. This latter point insinuates that I was indeed aware of the import of satisfying the expectations, albeit myopic, of the readers, i.e., my advisers. Even though I did not know how to call it at that time, such awareness bears some resemblance to the finding of Cohen and Riel (1989), that is, the awareness of the audience on the part of the (student) writers determines their writing performance.

Aware of my weakness in writing, I was deliberate to avoid topic pertinent to the teaching of writing which was taken by a number of my fellow cohorts. This decision drove me to select a topic related to text analysis of an (American) English novel. I think I was successful in hiding my weakness. As the time for the thesis viva voce was approaching, I started realizing to add another reader in my mind, that is, my examiner. However, I never thought of addressing the readers other than my two advisers and one examiner. Nor did I happen to think of relating my thesis to the broader body of knowledge. This phenomenon partly explains why some time in 2001 when I tried to reread my thesis for possibility of publishing a portion of it as an article, I found it hard to point out the significance of my research. Therefore, I have published nothing of it.

The year 2001 witnesses a turn-over in my concern about writing. I had an opportunity to attend English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes administered under the auspices of the Australian Government through the Australian Development Scholarship (ADS). Since I scored 7 in IELTS prior to it, I was assigned to the 6 week EAP. Among other things, the course led by a native Australian (of Irish blood) opened up my awareness of the possible differences between Australians and Indonesians with regard to their rhetorical practice and expectations. However, such an awareness raising did not work fully in me to be well prepared for a Master's Degree in an Australian university.

During my two-semester M.A., I was required to write some papers and a research proposal. I still can see it clearly that, on the first day of meeting the

program convener, I asked him for some samples of research proposal for M.A. projects. But, I secured no single sample proposal from him; he told me that the sample proposals would be confined to the creation of my would-be research proposal. Supposing that such a statement bears the truth of the words, I still disagree with it as I disagreed and was disappointed at that time. As I see it, I was exactly trying to apply my previous strategy of writing the undergraduate thesis, that is, trying to find some sample models for my own purpose of writing an M.A. project proposal. In this case, I saw and still maintain to see nothing harmful to read sample research proposals. Therefore, I continued to try to find samples of graduate research proposal I had never read at that time. When eventually I found a sample of graduate proposals (some M.A. and Ph.D.'s proposals), I felt quite relieved for I felt I could do it. Probably my program convener was right in a sense, but I found it hard myself as a novice to start writing a research proposal without any real example of what to include and to exclude. To me, aside from content, this last point relates to rhetoric.

Such an awareness of the rhetoric was raised further along the process of advisement with my program convener. The critical issue I still keep in mind was his suggestion that I show the reasons why I selected the topic; what made it important to conduct the research I chose. Such a suggestion directed me to a tentative conclusion that I should look at three issues: 1) how my topic of research was different from and similar to others', 2) how my research methodology differed from or bore some affinities to others', and 3) how the theories I was working with resembled or departed from others'. So, in finishing my proposal writing, I tried hard to meet such a self conclusion. I was thinking that if I could show those three issues in my proposal I could convince my reader, i.e., my supervisor. Irrespective of the grade I received, I thought my strategy (my tentative conclusion) worked.

At the end of my second semester, while waiting for the result of my M.A. project, one of my Indonesian fellows grappling with her Ph.D. proposal asked for my comments on her draft. Brought to me were all of her drafts with all comments from her supervisor. Quickly skimming the materials, I concluded that the comments from her supervisor were focused on the same notion given by my supervisor when commenting on my M.A. proposal draft. In other words, I concluded that my friend had similar problems to mine. Accordingly, I applied my tentative conclusion consisting of the three issues aforementioned which had worked for me. I used the conclusion as three principal questions. She seemed to be initially shocked to learn my questions, but, eventually, after giving consid-

eration to the questions for some time, she realized that she had the needed materials to answer my questions. Literally, she had the reserve to answer my questions.

The situation above pointed to the notion that she already had the necessary content of the proposal. What was left out was the “wrapping” of the content, that is, rhetoric. What we did subsequent to our examination of the draft was sorting out the materials to answer the triple-question and fabricating them in a more explicit way in her text of Ph.D. proposal. I tried principally to make sure that the three issues were addressed with some degree of explicitness. After doing the best with this rhetorical issue, she decided to show it to her supervisor before finding a native proofreader for the language accuracy. This time, her supervisor did not give “frustrating” comments; instead, she gave her approval of the Ph.D. prospectus for submission to the board of examiners.

Despite the mediocre grade I received for my own M.A. project, I started to develop a feeling that I could do a further graduate project; my “wrapping” metaphor which consists of the three keys of checklist seems to work. Subsequently, arriving back home, I, without any reserve, applied for a doctorate. Along the course of my doctoral probation, I switched my research plan three times. I feel I could do it without serious problems, for I stuck to the triple-key questions that have worked both for me and my fellow friend, which relates to rhetoric. As I render it, my failure with the first and second topic of research proposals along my doctoral probationary period was a matter of mismatch between my topic and the available expertise.

Fortunately, I could, eventually, select rhetorical problem as my topic of doctoral research. Since this rhetorical problem has been often amalgamated with endeavors in the realm of academic writing, I started searching reading materials pertinent to the writing of academic pieces. I came across Flowerdew’s (2001) article about the attitudes of international journal editors towards the contribution of non-native speakers of English. This article matches my other tentative conclusion during my M.A. studies that grading of academic papers is a matter of the degree of match between the lecturers’ expectations and what is in the papers; whether the papers satisfy the expectations of the lecturers.

At this juncture, the word rhetoric was not yet conceived of in my mind. After reading through Flowerdew’s article aforementioned, I realized the necessity to show “research niche”, the notion Flowerdew attributes to Swales—his *Create a Research Space* (CARS) formulation. This situation directed me to find Swales’ CARS model and at, this moment, I started to relate rhetoric to re-

search articles as a genre among other genres of writing. In other words, I found some supports to my triple-key issues. The triple-key issues are then clear to me to be central to the CARS model in Swales' (1990) book-length treatise. This situation further led me to ponder about other rhetorical cases that might be faced by Indonesians (other than the one abovementioned). This guided me to venture on genre analysis of RAs written in English by Indonesians.

MEASURING MY CASE AGAINST THE WIDER CONTEXT

From the outset, the present paper has been situated in the enterprise of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Indonesian context, for English is not L1 in Indonesia (Debyasuvarn, 1981). Under any circumstances, ELT is set to escort the learners (encompassing Indonesian nonnative speakers of English) to attain sound communicative ability (competence). Since the present paper has to do with communication, particularly, in written form (academic writing), the following discussion shall be put into the context of communicative competence, which has, since the propagation of Communicative Approach, constituted the paramount goal of ELT (Dobson, 2001).

The formulation of communicative competence started taking a clear form in the hands of Canale and Swain (1980), and Canale (1983). In their formulation, communicative competence incorporates grammatical, sociolinguistic, discoursal, and strategic competence. Pertinent to grammatical competence which has to do with the mastery of the linguistic code which covers the phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic features or levels, I could not say in an evaluative way about my own position; what I can say is that my recent Computer-based TOEFL (CBT) scores (in 2004) resided within the range of 255-275 with the essay score of 5.5. I could also say, in tandem, that my mentors both in Australia and the U.S. have strongly tended to comment that I still have "idiosyncratic" English phraseology in my English academic writing. I also feel insecure with English articles (*the, a, or zero article*).

As regards the sociolinguistic competence which deals with the ability to measure and judge the sociocultural context so as to appropriately fit expressions into it, I would read it with caution. Appropriate expressions, in this context, require appropriateness in meaning as well as in form. Canale's (1983) appropriateness in the sociolinguistic sense takes into account factors such as status of conversants or interactants, purposes of conversation and/or interaction, norms of conversation and/or interaction. In this sense, the formulation of socio-

linguistic competence seems to apply only to oral communication. Therefore, I cannot say if my writing performance in RAs written in English has to do with the sociolinguistic competence. Probably, it has to do with it when I write emails to native speakers of English.

To me, academic writing in English seems to be closely related to discourse competence which pertains to the knowledge and skills to interpret and generate either written or spoken texts so as to make them logical in terms of coherence and cohesion. This notion requires the speaker and hearer (writer and reader) to, among others, share the discourse structure (Savignon, 1997). The discourse structure in Savignon's (1997) observation might include the presentation and staging of information, which can be referred to as rhetoric in academic writing.

It has been mildly adumbrated that the present paper has taken up the spirit of contrastive analysis (of my own rhetorical concerns). In the context of foreign language learning and teaching, closeness in measure of the mastery of the non-native speakers (who are supposedly to be life-long learners) to the acquisition of the native speakers is the target to arrive at. This holds true particularly with those (nonnative speakers) intending to use the language as in the writing of English RAs. Yet, it needs noting that second/foreign language learners hardly become native speakers of the language. This is particularly so vis-à-vis the notion that acquisition is also meant to incorporate cultural domains of the target language, which is not easy. Kramsch (cited in Hinkel, 1999:6) avers that 'non-native speakers [even] who have had many years of experience with second culture may have to find their "own place" at the intersection of their natal and target cultures' [emphasis original].

In other words, irrespective of the TOEFL scores I hit, I feel to have developed a kind of rhetorical awareness. So, in my view, to embrace a larger number of nonnative speakers of English, a crucial target to arrive at is "bi-rhetorical competence" (Basthomi, 2005). I am using "bi" to also suggest "multi"; but, since I myself am likely to be able only to deal with two languages—Indonesian and English—I personally would use "bi-rhetorical." I am also referring to "competence" to suggest that I might have certain rhetorical awareness which yet might not be realized in my actual writing. Thus, my introspection links to what has been stated by Beardsmore (1982) that bilingualism and biculturalism do not have symmetrical relationship; the level of language acquisition does not always reflect the level of cultural acquisition, including rhetorical acquisition.

In early 2005, I had the opportunities to approach some Indonesian journal

editors and/or reviewers for interviews centering around their comments on the writing of English RAs, as one form of academic writing, by Indonesian writers. These interviews were particularly conducted in the light of Flowerdew's (2001) which dealt with international journal editors. The general impression I have developed from the interviews is that, compared to that of the international journal editors/reviewers, the Indonesian journal editors and/or reviewers have different focus of what to be deemed crucial in the writing of RAs. Whilst international journal editors tend to focus on the introduction section of RAs, Indonesian journal editors and/or reviewers do not give particular attention to that section.

Assuming that the journal editors and/or reviewers have a strong influence to the end product of RAs as academic writing, I would see that the Indonesian journal editors and/or reviewers have not adequately inculcated the Indonesian writers of English RAs to practice the likely expected English rhetoric of RAs. In other words, I am suggesting that Indonesian writers of English RAs need to raise their awareness of the potential rhetorical expectations practiced in the English community if they wish to publish RAs in international journals. I am thinking of the awareness as the prerequisite. Whether this awareness will really manifest in the actual writing is a question of time and practice. Awareness also suggests that they already have their own rhetorical norms, that is, of Indonesian to be measured against the rhetorical norms of other languages. This is what I mean by bi-rhetorical competence, encompassing the comparative outlook of their own rhetoric and the rhetoric normalized in the target language, in this case, English.

So, turning to the enterprise of ELT (inclusive of EAP), tutors need to guide the learners to consciously subscribe to the rhetorical expectations of the representatives of international discourse community, for instance journal editors and/or reviewers, particularly for the purpose of publishing pieces of academic writing. Such a proposal bears an allegiance to genre-based approach to the teaching of writing. Genre approach emphasizes the observation of the interplay between texts and the contexts of culture and situation, the context of situation involving the language choices with respect to register and culture incorporating options in terms of the overall genre, i.e., (generic) structure of texts or genres at stake (e.g., Iswari, 2005; Mirahayuni, 2002). In brief, my rhetorical journey insinuates that (contrastive) rhetorical awareness for non-native speakers of English is of particular significance (see also Ahmad, 1997; Safnil 2000; Swales & Feak, 2000; Tardy & Swales, forthcoming).

The foregoing discussion indicates, albeit mildly, that being Indonesians, in general, means being debilitated in terms of the language whereby they can participate in the production of academic discourse, encompassing science and knowledge or cluster of ideas (Herzberg in Swales, 1990). It follows that, attempts to promote the linguistic competence of Indonesian academics to actively engage in global academic discourse necessitate the sensitization on the part of the academics to the rhetoric of English academic writing as normalized in the English speaking communities. This means a submission to the massive force of “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1992) or dominant discourse (Iswari, 2005). This might lend itself to a question if such a decision would be tenable.

Mukminatien (2004) has put forth a proposal to elevate the status of English in Indonesia. English has been thus far deemed foreign in the Indonesia context, as noted by Debyasuvarn (1981). Since this has not much helped Indonesians, especially academics, gain the capacity to be able to actively contribute to the world academic discourse or wide discourse community through the publication of, especially, academic writing (Mirahayuni, 2001; Djojodibroto, 2004), Mukminatien’s proposal seems to have some merit. This might be counterproductive to attempts of other postcolonial communities to challenge (through some kind of appropriation, abrogation, and subversion) the domination of English (Ashcroft, et al., 1989; 1998).

In response to such a possible objection, I would think of the following points. First, the submission to the English domination suggested here only takes place to a selected area, that is, the rhetoric of academic writing, thus, only touches upon the practical purposes. Second, the (selected, selective) submission allows Indonesians to have control over the language. At this point, it is interesting to cite Samuel’s (2000:2) quotation of a comment of his Malaysian student concerning the matter, “English may be an imperialistic or colonial language, but in using it and making it submit to our will, we have colonized it; it’s a matter of who will be the master—the language or the people who use the language.” The last, Indonesians are not comparable with the other postcolonial communities able to challenge the domination of English through appropriation, abrogation, and subversion. I would think that Indonesians do not have the “right” to exert such a challenge, for, by and large, they are not brought up within the English speaking community and, hence, do not normally have the “feel” of the language. Consequently, they will not be able to proffer some appropriation, abrogation, and subversion. Were they in that position, they would run the risk of being called “incompetent”, “deviant”, “aberrant” and the like, for

the language is not their belonging.

So, to a wider context beyond Indonesia, any proposal to enjoin Indonesians to actively participate in the world discourse community through academic writing necessitates a submission on the part of the Indonesian writers to a medium able to break up the rhetorical insulation. In other words, the selective submission as put forth above suggests “activeness” on the part of Indonesians; it is for the purpose of contributing to the world discourse through, particularly, rhetorical awareness. However, since the present paper has been based on a subjective-introspective venture, further corroborations are in the offing.

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